



# Newcastle Gateshead Music City Foundation Report – April 2026



**This city knows  
how to make noise.**

**It always has.**



Music here isn't just about volume or moments. It's how people come together, how stories are shared, and how voices that might otherwise go unheard find space and strength.

For generations, sound has been part of how this place expresses itself – in joy, in resistance, in celebration and in solidarity.

## **That instinct hasn't changed. But the moment has.**

Now is the time for Newcastle Gateshead Music City to lead the next chapter – championing the artists, venues, communities and businesses that power music here, and making sure this city's voice is heard clearly, confidently and for the long term.



# Introducing Newcastle Gateshead Music City

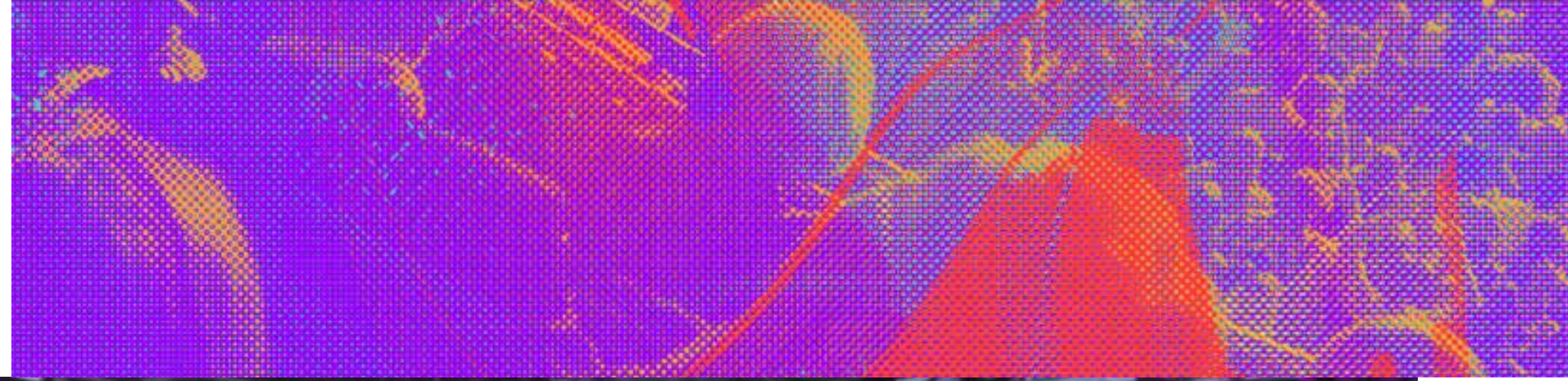


PORTERS, Little Buildings

Newcastle Gateshead Music City exists to champion the stories, legacy and impact of music in this place – from artists and venues to the people, communities and businesses that power the wider music ecosystem.

## **We believe music here is more than culture or entertainment.**

It is part of how this region expresses itself, connects people, builds opportunity and drives economic and social value. Our role is to make sure that contribution is recognised, supported and sustained – not just locally, but nationally and internationally.



Newcastle Gateshead Music City brings together the people, ideas and infrastructure needed to strengthen the music sector across Newcastle and Gateshead. We work to amplify what already exists, address the barriers holding the sector back, and help create the conditions for music to thrive long term – creatively, culturally and economically.

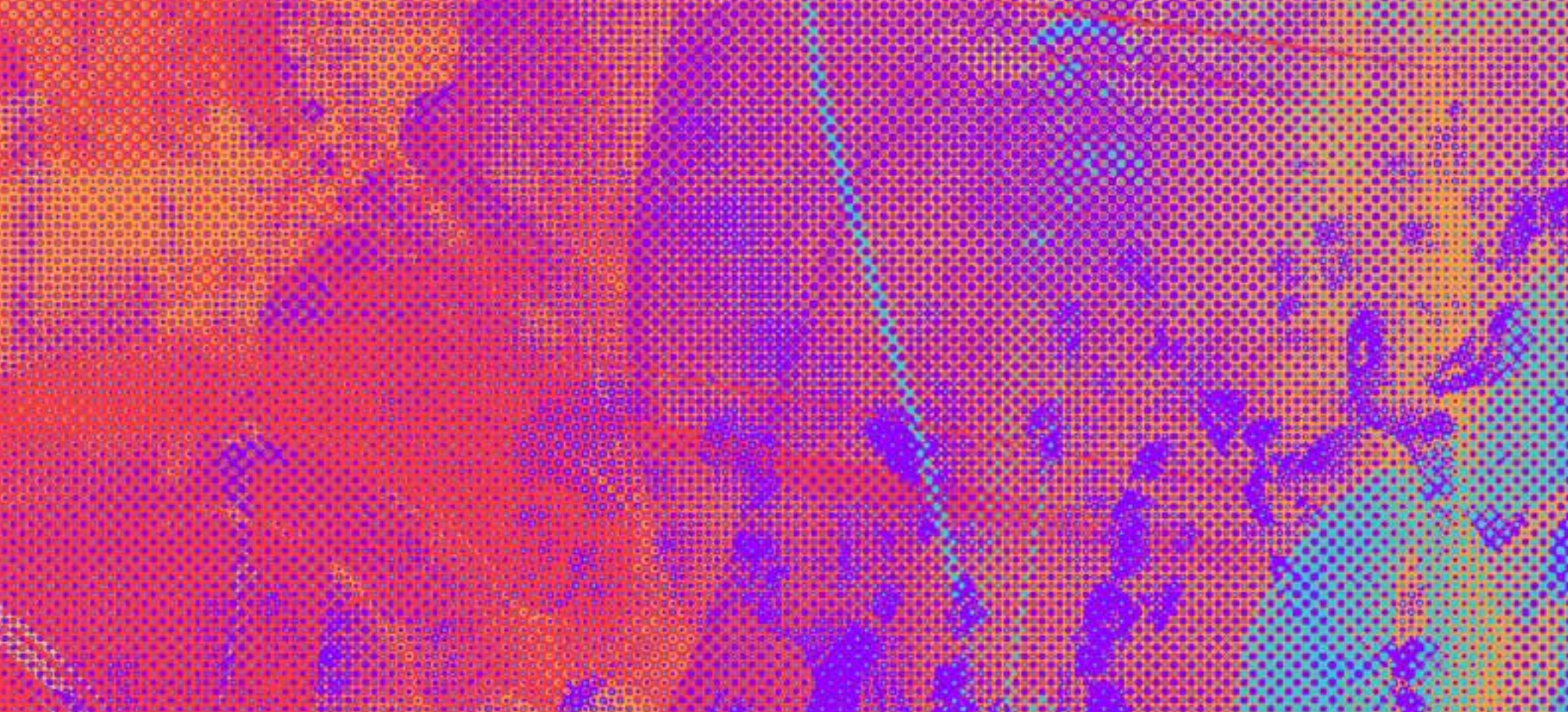
## **This work is rooted in collaboration.**

It is shaped by the experiences of those working in music at every level, and driven by a shared ambition to see the region recognised as a leading place for music to be made, experienced and built into careers.

Newcastle Gateshead Music City is led by Generator and The Glasshouse International Centre for Music. Together, we are focused on building a joined-up, future-facing music ecosystem – one that reflects the character of this place, supports the people within it and creates lasting impact for the region.



# About this report



## **This report marks the first step in setting the long-term direction of Newcastle Gateshead Music City.**

It brings together a year of research and listening to understand the realities of making, supporting and sustaining music across the city region – and where collective action can make the greatest difference. It also sets out a clear ambition: for Newcastle Gateshead to be recognised as a leading Music City outside the capital, driving national influence and international ambition.

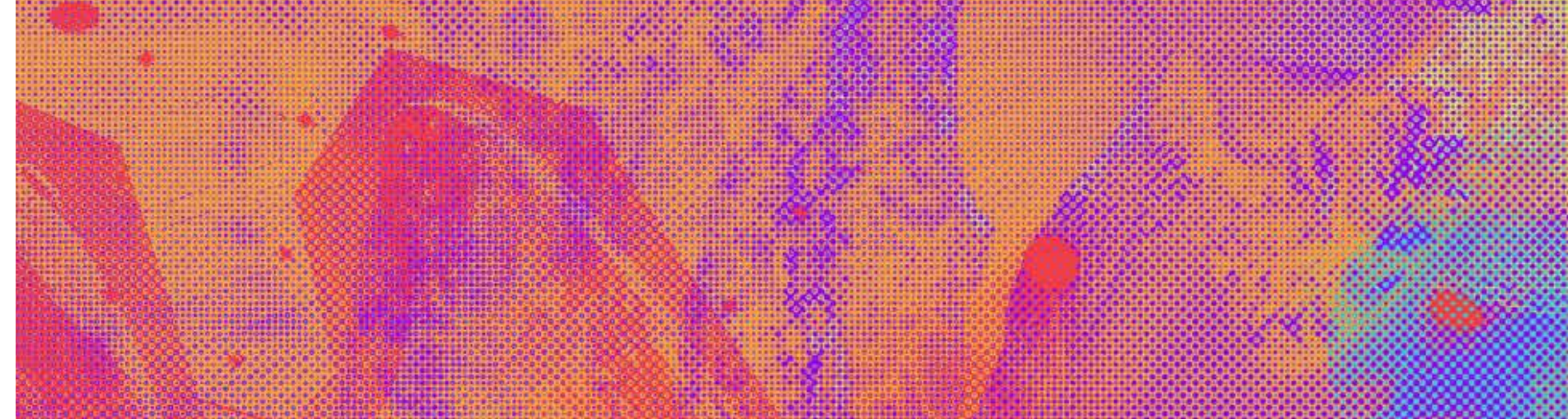
Developed with Counterculture and Newcastle University, and supported by the North East Combined Authority, the research draws on conversations with artists, venues, industry professionals, businesses and supporters from across the local music ecosystem.



# What we heard was clear

Newcastle Gateshead is a place where music is made, lived and shared – shaped by artists, scenes and communities with deep roots and bold ambition. From emerging talent building confidence in local venues to artists reaching national and global stages, the city region continues to punch above its weight.

That creative strength is now backed by growing infrastructure and influence: major label partnerships, a strategic partnership with the BBC, world-class venues, and increasing investment in skills and facilities. Music is recognised as a priority sector for economic growth within the North East Combined Authority's plans, alongside active engagement with national government to help shape policy, investment and ambition for the UK music industry - positioning Newcastle Gateshead as a place not just producing talent, but shaping its future at home and internationally.



Imogen and The Knife, Three Tanners Bank





The research recognises both the strength of what already exists in Newcastle Gateshead and the barriers that must be addressed to unlock long-term success. These insights cut across the whole ecosystem, from talent development and infrastructure to access, sustainability and growth.

**This report distils those insights into six initial areas of focus for Newcastle Gateshead Music City. It is not a final plan. It is a foundation for collective action.**

In 2026, these focus areas will be developed into a Strategic Plan. Through collaboration with partners locally, nationally and internationally, Newcastle Gateshead will continue to shape a world-class, connected and sustainable music ecosystem built for long-term impact.



# Building Newcastle Gateshead Music City

## We're not starting from scratch

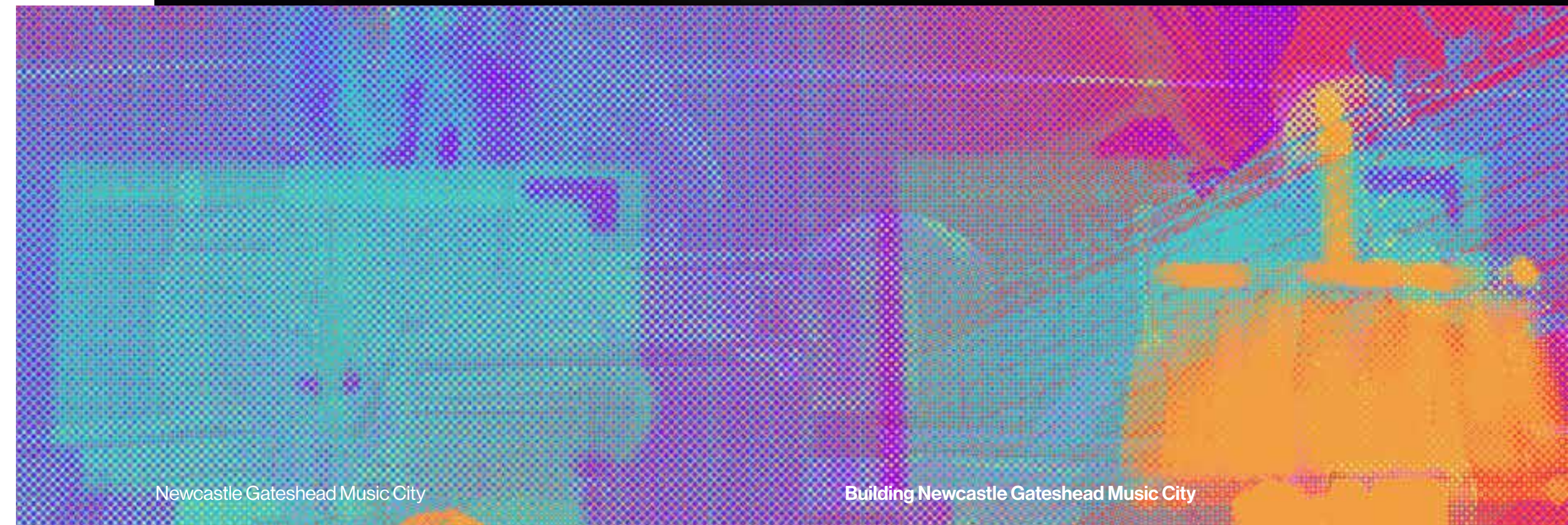
Music has been built here for decades by artists, venues, communities and independent businesses shaping their own paths.

The research points to a region already rich in talent, activity and ambition, with a music ecosystem that plays a significant cultural and economic role – and one that is growing fast.

**In 2023/24 alone, music contributed £364 million to the regional economy, supported over 3,000 jobs, and attracted 714,000 visitors – almost double the previous year.**

There are now more than 1,400 music businesses and artists operating across the North East.

Maria Wloszczowska and Royal Northern Sinfonia, The Glasshouse





But growth doesn't happen by accident. It happens when people come together around a shared ambition. That momentum has been driven by collaboration.

Strategic organisations such as Generator, working at local, regional and national government level alongside artists, venues, broadcasters and industry partners, have helped bring major national moments to the region – from the Mercury Prize and MOBO Awards, generating over £2 million in economic benefit and engaging thousands of young people through associated fringe programmes, to attracting new label investment and expanding skills development.

**This has resulted in £1.8 million being secured for a new studio and creative content facility in Newcastle, backed by a major label.**

At the same time, the North East has one of Europe's leading music centres in The Glasshouse. It has generated £1 billion of economic and social value since opening, offered 3 million music lessons, and provided a national platform for artists, recently including JADE's collaboration with Royal Northern Sinfonia at BBC Proms, also broadcast on BBC Two. Each year it works with 100s of artists from the North, at all stages of their musical development.



Dan Swift (left) and The97Renn (right), Boiler Shop



Alongside these headline moments, sustained advocacy across the sector helped secure the Mayor's Small Venues Fund in early 2026. This is a dedicated fund recognising that grassroots venues, community organisations and independent promoters as the engine room of the ecosystem: the spaces where scenes are built, skills are learned and careers begin.

**The message from the research is clear:**

**The foundations are strong, the region is growing faster than ever, but the ecosystem is fragmented.**

The six areas of focus that follow respond directly to this. They set out where coordination, collaboration and targeted action can strengthen what already exists, and support a more connected, resilient and future-facing music ecosystem for Newcastle Gateshead.

# Creative Communities and Collaboration

**From small venues, touring and festivals to the creation of supportive, nurturing spaces for future artists, the grassroots scene fuels our music ecosystem. It is where talent is tested, ideas are shaped and careers begin. It also creates real economic value - generating jobs for artists, session musicians, promoters, crews and local supply chains.**



Melanie Baker, The Cumberland Arms



This is the lifeblood of Newcastle Gateshead. It reflects the region's DIY ethos, strong sense of community and proudly working-class roots.

## **83% of interviewees identified grassroots venues and organisations as key stakeholders in developing the local music sector.**

While this figure reflects in-depth interviews primarily with grassroots representatives, it reinforces a widely held view across the ecosystem: without strong grassroots, the wider sector cannot thrive.

Grassroots venues and organisations continue to operate under pressure, facing rising costs and limited capacity. The Small Venues Fund is a significant and welcome step forward – providing targeted support for the grassroots and helping unlock more opportunities for emerging artists to perform, develop and connect.



Rye, The Grove





Strengthening collaboration and advocacy will be critical to building on this progress. Working more closely with national bodies such as UK Music, LIVE and LIVE Trust, alongside Generator's role on the Creative Industries Council, will help create stronger, more effective routes for lobbying, policy influence and long-term support for grassroots venues and businesses.

There is also significant opportunity to better connect grassroots initiatives with large-scale projects and major industry investment – making sure events and developments such as the MOBO Awards, Mercury Prize, BBC Proms, EMI North, Warner Music Newcastle and Tyneside Studios deliver lasting benefit across the ecosystem.

It's essential we protect and support small venues, rehearsal spaces and recording studios and find creative ways to open up more spaces for community use, collaboration and learning. By backing local promoters, networks and artists, Newcastle Gateshead can continue to build a grassroots music ecosystem that is resilient, inclusive and fit for the future.

# Regional Music Funding



Hazel Wilde, Lanterns on the Lake, Tyneside Cinema

Newcastle Gateshead needs a fairer share of public funding for artists, music businesses and projects.

**Right now, funding is inconsistent, hard to access and often too short-term or narrowly defined.**

This makes it difficult for grassroots organisations, independent businesses and artists to plan, grow or attract inward investment. The current system does not reflect the diversity, scale or reality of the region's music ecosystem.



**66% of respondents want more grants and clearer information about funding for local artists and businesses.**

**56% say they have been affected by a lack of paid opportunities to work and perform.**

As national funding becomes increasingly competitive, regional investment and partnerships are more crucial than ever. Music is now recognised as a priority sector for the region and is embedded within wider national ambitions, following sustained leadership and advocacy across the sector. This creates a real opportunity to do things differently.



Francesca Pidgeon, Dilletante, Gosforth Civic Theatre



## **We need more space to create, perform and collaborate - and clearer, more accessible routes to funding that make this possible.**

The research fed into development of a successful bid to the North East Combined Authority's Festivals and Events Fund by the Tyneside Promoter Network to help match grassroots music businesses with bid-writing support. Place-based approaches that respond to evidence and need can help strengthen the sector.

Building on this, we will develop a 'Green Book' standard case for investment, strengthening the region's ability to secure public funding from regional and national sources. National evidence shows that investment in music delivers strong economic and social returns - and Newcastle Gateshead is well placed to make that case.

By better aligning regional cultural strategies and funding priorities, we can simplify access to funding, reduce barriers and support longer-term sustainability.

With fairer access to funding and paid opportunities, the sector can focus on what matters most: creating music, building businesses and enabling talent to succeed.


# Economy, Industry and Sustainability

The creative sector in the North East is having its moment – or perhaps the rest of the country is simply catching up. Across music, film and screen, publishing, gaming and technology, creative communities have been accelerated by collaboration and a growing presence within regional and national strategies.

Cultural leaders, including Generator and The Glasshouse International Centre for Music, are helping ensure music is embedded in conversations about growth, skills and place – not treated as an add-on.



Maia Beth, The Grove



## **Nationally, the UK Government's Music Growth Package has doubled investment in music to up to £10 million a year for the next three years, while the North East has been selected for a £25 million Creative Industries Growth Package.**

Given recent year-on-year growth of almost 100% in music tourism Gross Value Added (GVA) and the creation of more than 1,400 additional jobs, the case for sustained investment in the region's music sector is strong – and the data supports it.

Evidence from the Creative Industries Policy and Evidence Centre (PEC) shows that if the North increased its share of creative GVA to just 5%, driven by areas such as music tourism, job creation and skills development, it could contribute £10 billion annually by 2030.

Regionally, the North East Combined Authority has committed to growing the creative industries through its Mayoral Manifesto, Devolution Deal and Local Growth Plan – with ambitions to create 46,000 jobs, add £1.67 billion to the economy and expand music tourism through new venues, festivals and events.

Destination North East England has also set an ambition to double the visitor economy to £10 billion by 2034, with music tourism identified as a key driver.

There's a major opportunity here for the taking – but impact will only be realised if the sector moves in step.

## **40% of respondents to the research said they want to see stronger advocacy for music at both local and national levels.**

The research points to a clear need for better coordination between local authorities, creative communities and national government. By aligning music industry plans with wider strategies across tourism, education, health and economic growth, Newcastle Gateshead can address gaps in infrastructure, grow and diversify audiences, and ensure music delivers long-term, sustainable benefits for the region.

# Places and Infrastructure



**We need more places for music to happen. Spaces where people can make it, play it, hear it and dance to it.**

**But this is about more than venues. A thriving Music City needs a connected infrastructure around it - grassroots creative hubs, affordable rehearsal and recording spaces, business support, places to learn, meet and collaborate and venues of all sizes that allow artists to grow their audiences and careers.**



Right now, there are clear gaps in the North East's music infrastructure. We lack enough mid-sized venues and larger performance spaces, meaning tours bypass the region and artists are often forced to leave to access opportunity elsewhere. This represents a loss not just of talent, but of significant economic value, with millions in potential economic output leaving the region each year.

**Compared with other UK Music Cities, the North East has around 10% more artists and musicians, but nearly 50% fewer music industry assets across publishing, licensing, recording, distribution and management.**

Too often, artists still rely on services based elsewhere to manage the business of music-making – though this is beginning to change through new partnerships with major labels and broadcasters.



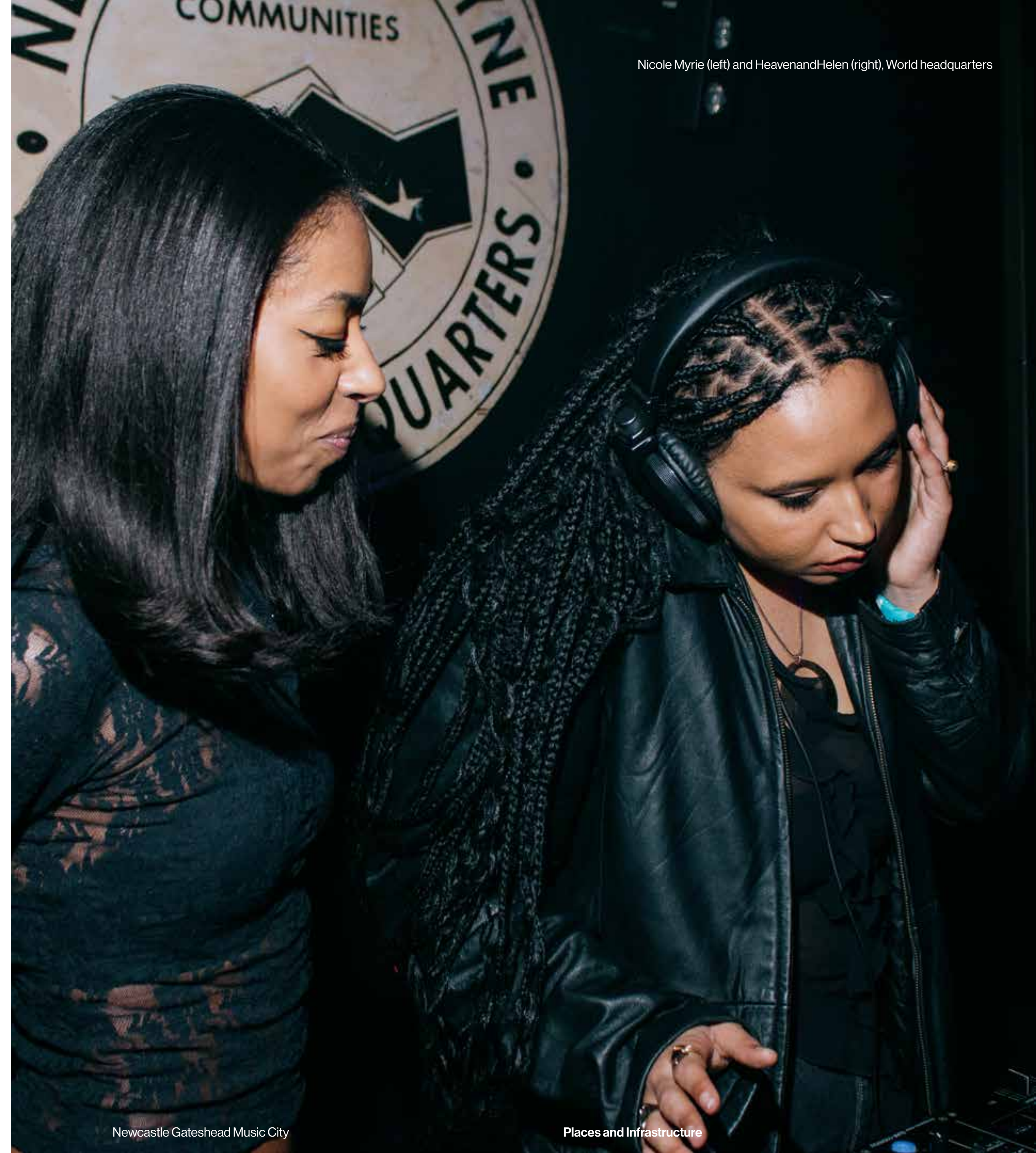
Newcastle Gateshead Music City will actively support the growth of a stronger local industry infrastructure – including record labels, publishers, artist managers and specialist services such as legal, finance, media and marketing. This will ensure the region has the professional support needed to match its creative output.

But this ambition doesn't stop at our doorstep. We will champion Newcastle Gateshead as a leading UK Music City: showcasing local talent, attracting international touring artists and orchestras, bringing major events to the region and creating new ones of our own. Strengthening links with national and international music networks, alongside closer collaboration across the wider North East, will be central to this.

**We want more people to see and hear what's being created here. And where audiences or industry aren't yet coming to us, we'll take the work to them.**

Building on existing trade and export activity, we will strengthen national and international touring, expand showcasing and exchange programmes, and work closely with the Northern Music Export Office, powered by Generator, to create more global opportunities for local artists and music businesses.

Nicole Myrie (left) and HeavenandHelen (right), World headquarters



# People, Talent and Pathways

**Talent is everywhere.  
Opportunity is not.**





We need clear, connected routes for people to access music – from early years and schools, to community music-making through choirs, amateur ensembles and bands; from colleges and universities, to on-the-job learning, artist development and paid work in the industry. At every stage, people need to be able to see a future for themselves here, and to experience the lasting benefits of music for their wellbeing and life chances.

For artists, support programmes delivered by organisations such as Generator and The Glasshouse International Centre for Music are well regarded, but the research shows demand for more.



**34% of respondents felt a wider range of artist development opportunities is needed, alongside greater investment in emerging talent - not just those who have already broken through.**

Early access matters. Through partnerships with schools and music organisations, the North East Music Hub delivers the National Plan for Music Education across the region, working with more than 800 schools each year, delivering 17,500 music lessons and training 1,800 teachers. But there are still young people who aren't able to access music outside school or at home. We need more ways for young people to get started - whether that's playing a first note, stepping onto a stage for the first time, or landing their first job in the music industry. For those who do want to make music their career, the research highlights a disconnect between education and industry need.

**25% of music businesses said they had been affected by an inability to recruit people with the right skills.**

For businesses, this means being under-resourced. For graduates, it means struggling to find work.



Youth ensemble Jambone, The Glasshouse



Music education at The Glasshouse

Newcastle Gateshead Music City

People, Talent and Pathways



Evidence shows that targeted, industry-led skills development works. Evaluation of Generator-led skills programmes funded through the North of Tyne Combined Authority's Skills for Growth scheme indicates a strong return on investment, forecasting £5.80-£6.60 of economic value for every £1 invested. That's a projected impact of £2.9-£3.3 million.

These figures underline both the economic and social value of investing in people and pathways.

Stronger collaboration between the music industry and the region's colleges and universities will be key.

By developing more business-focused music education – spanning vocational skills, entrepreneurship and industry practice as well as performance – we can better prepare people for the full range of roles the sector needs.

**This is about investing in young people, supporting talent on our doorstep, and building a music ecosystem that works for the next generation as well as this one.**

# Music as a home for everyone




## **We're a music region.**

Music is woven into our history, whatever genre you're into, and however you engage with it. In recent years, we've faced major challenges. The cost-of-living crisis and the global pandemic have reshaped how we spend our money and time and how we do business.

**41% of respondents said they have felt the impact of declining audience numbers, with grassroots venues and the night time economy under particular pressure.**





At the same time, rising costs mean people are making more careful choices about how they spend their time and money. Taken together, these shifts make it more important than ever that music remains open, accessible and relevant to the lives people are living now.

Whether you sing in a local choir, play an instrument in an amateur orchestra or brass band, or enjoy hearing your new favourite artist live, you'll know the benefits music brings to our health and wellbeing. We need to make sure this is open to everyone.

The data also points to underlying structural challenges. Compared with England and Wales overall, the North East has lower levels of cultural engagement, higher rates of insecure employment, poorer health outcomes, and an older and less ethnically diverse population. But statistics only tell part of the story. What the research also reveals is a region with a deep sense of community, solidarity and pride – strengths that underpin the way music is made, shared and supported here.

Experiences of equality, diversity and inclusion across the sector are mixed. Some point to meaningful progress, including the legacy of initiatives such as the MOBO Awards, while others highlight persistent barriers – particularly for women, working-class people, disabled people and LGBTQIA+ communities accessing careers, leadership roles and opportunities in music

Newcastle Gateshead Music City will work closely with communities and underrepresented groups to support more inclusive pathways into music – from recruitment and leadership to programming and participation. This means opening doors, sharing power and ensuring that the sector better reflects the people who live here.

## **Music should be a place where everyone feels they belong.**

A space to connect, create, build confidence and improve wellbeing. By widening access and removing barriers, we can make sure everyone has the opportunity not just to enjoy music, but to shape it – now and for the future.



# From insight to action



The research has given Newcastle Gateshead Music City a strong evidence base and a shared understanding of where the music ecosystem is thriving, and where greater coordination and support are needed.

The ambitions in this report describe the direction of travel for Newcastle Gateshead Music City. They are intentionally high-level and outcomes-focused, rather than fixed delivery targets. Where robust quantitative baselines are not yet in place, the first year will focus on data collection, benchmarking and shared measurement.

**These ambitions will be developed into clear actions, measures and delivery plans through the Newcastle Gateshead Music City Strategic Plan, to be published in 2026.**

# Our ambitions

## Creative Communities and Collaboration

- ▶ Build a connected regional music network that enables regular collaboration, shared learning and co-development.
- ▶ Increase cross-sector projects linking grassroots activity, heritage, education and industry.
- ▶ Better recognise and integrate the region's musical heritage into contemporary practice.

## Regional Music Funding

- ▶ Secure a fairer share of public funding for artists, music businesses and projects in Newcastle Gateshead.
- ▶ Improve access to funding through clearer routes, longer-term investment and better-aligned regional strategies.
- ▶ Strengthen the region's ability to attract public and private investment through robust, evidence-led cases for support.

## Economy, Industry and Sustainability

- ▶ Improve the financial resilience of music businesses, freelancers and organisations.
- ▶ Shift a greater proportion of investment towards longer-term development and organisational stability.
- ▶ Increase adoption of fair pay principles, good working practices and professional development opportunities.

## Places and Infrastructure

- ▶ Protect existing grassroots venues and stabilise the wider ecosystem of rehearsal, recording and production spaces.
- ▶ Strengthen planning, licensing and policy mechanisms that safeguard music spaces.
- ▶ Improve the geographic spread and affordability of music spaces across Newcastle and Gateshead.

## People, Talent and Pathways

- ▶ Establish a clearly mapped and widely understood regional talent pathway, connecting education, grassroots activity and professional opportunity.
- ▶ Increase the number of artists and music professionals able to sustain paid work within the region.
- ▶ Improve retention of emerging talent, particularly from under-represented communities.

## Music as a Home for Everyone

- ▶ Ensure music in Newcastle Gateshead is open, accessible and welcoming to everyone, across all communities.
- ▶ Increase participation and representation for people historically under-represented in music audiences and careers.
- ▶ Embed inclusion, wellbeing and belonging across programming, leadership and decision-making.



# A message from our Chair

“This report provides a strong foundation for the future of Newcastle Gateshead Music City and reflects the voices and expertise of the artists, organisations, communities and partners who shaped it.

The Board recognises and values this contribution and is fully committed to the insights and responsibilities the findings bring. This is not an end point, but a starting point, and we will work with partners across the sector to translate this evidence into clear priorities and action. Through the development and delivery of our Strategic Plan across 2026 and beyond, the Board will be accountable for turning insight into action and supporting a connected, resilient and future-facing music ecosystem for Newcastle Gateshead.”

## **Michelle Escoffery, Newcastle Gateshead Music City Chair**



Michelle Escoffery, Newcastle Civic Centre

A halftone-style photograph of a group of people in a meeting. The image is composed of a grid of dots in various colors, including red, blue, yellow, and green. The people are shown from the chest up, some looking towards the camera and others looking slightly away. The word "END." is written in red, capital letters on the clothing of several individuals. The overall effect is a textured, high-contrast visual.

# About the research

## Interviewees were asked about:

The economic contribution of the North East's music sector; the make up of our workforce, education and talent pipeline; key assets (ie venues, artists, businesses, festivals); the gaps, barriers, weaknesses and opportunities; what interventions might be needed and what outcomes (economic, cultural and social) successful development could lead to.

## Key Stakeholder Groups:

- ▶ Artists and Musicians
- ▶ Education and Community
- ▶ Live and Events
- ▶ Management and Business Services
- ▶ Marketing and Media
- ▶ Publishing and Licensing
- ▶ Recording and Distribution
- ▶ Rehearsal and Equipment
- ▶ Strategic Organisations

## The research team conducted:

- ▶ **5 x sub-regional strategic roundtables**  
9, 10, 11, 12 June; 22 participants – (i) Durham (ii) Newcastle & Gateshead (iii) North Tyneside (iv) Northumberland (v) South Tyneside.
- ▶ **5 x thematic industry group roundtables**  
11, 17, 18 June; 30 participants – (i) Artists & Musicians (ii) Education, Community & Artist Development (iii) Live & Events (iv) Recording, Publishing & Distribution (v) Marketing, Media, Management & Business Services.
- ▶ **2 x regional cross-sectoral roundtables**  
26 Jun; 10 participants.
- ▶ **1 x online stakeholder survey**  
2 May – 27 June; 35 responses.



# Credits

# Thanks to

- ▶ Counterculture
- ▶ Newcastle University
  
- ▶ Michelle Escoffery, Chair
- ▶ Jim Mawdsley, Vice Chair
- ▶ Newcastle Gateshead Music City Advisory Board:  
*Adam Behr, Deni Chambers, Nicola Coaker, Gabriel Day, Kay Greyson, Oladapo Nuga (Daps), Yaw Owusu, Becci Scotcher, Joel Thompson.*
  
- ▶ North East Combined Authority
- ▶ Newcastle City Council
- ▶ Gateshead Council
- ▶ Design by Gardiner Richardson

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